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SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR (ANDRE CADIEUX, VELIA DePIRRO)

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SUBJECT: JAMAICA: OLYMPIC TRIUMPHS IN BEIJING IGNITE
NATIONAL EUPHORIA

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¶1. Spectacular performances by Jamaican athletes at the Beijing Olympics have enthralled this nation of 2.7 million, dominating the media and igniting widespread spontaneous celebrations. In Kingston and Montego Bay, normal commerce and traffic have slowed to a crawl as thousands have remained glued to large-screen outdoor televisions set up by the government. To date:

-- the Jamaicans have won 5 gold, 3 silver, and 1 bronze medals;
-- Sprinter Usain Bolt has set new world records in both the 100 and 200 meter races (reportedly thus within hours boosting global sales of "Puma" shoes);
-- Shelly-Ann Fraser, Sherone Simpson, and Kerron Stewart have swept the women's 100 meters;
-- Melaine Walker has won the 400-meter hurdles for women, while Shericka Williams has taken a silver medal in the 400-meter flat event for women.

¶2. Minister of Tourism Edmund Bartlett and Minister of Culture Olivia "Babsy" Grange are in Beijing, and have made statements congratulating Jamaica's heroes and expressing appreciation for the international acclaim and attention they have won for the island nation. For his part, Prime Minister Bruce Golding has extolled Usain Bolt as a role model for Jamaican youth - proof of the value of hard work, discipline, and dedication. Golding has told the nation: "It's more than just what the athletes are doing. I think that it is a reminder to us, and this is what I think is really exciting the Jamaican people, of just how powerful we are, how talented we are, how capable we are, the kind of capacity we have for great things." When the athletes return home, they will be welcomed as virtual demigods at a planned massive celebration.

Analysis: Tantamount to the Moon Landing

¶3. The 2008 Beijing Olympics are to Jamaica much as the 1969 moon landing was to the USA: an historic achievement and mesmerizing symbol of national pride, bringing euphoria at a time it is sorely needed. Over the last year, ordinary Jamaicans have been battered by Hurricane Dean, resurgent inflation, an alarming crime wave, stubbornly high unemployment, and skyrocketing prices for food, fuel, and commodities (refuels). At last, ordinary Jamaicans have something to cheer about. Moreover, the international attention should bolster the island's vital tourism sector and could stimulate investor interest.

JOHNSON